Modals of Necessity and Obligation: 
*MUST, HAVE to, MUSTN'T, NEEDN'T, etc.*

A) General Points

- *Have to* is not a “real” modal verb: Its meaning is that of a modal, but in terms of form and use, it behaves just like a normal verb. All the forms that are missing in modals are available for *Have to*, and it needs an auxiliary for questions and negations. The same goes for *Need to*, but not for *Needn’t*.
- *MUST* has one form only. There is no past, no infinitive, no -ing form, no past participle, and no to-infinitive. For past obligation, use *had to*.
- *MUSTN’T* is not for non-obligation/non-necessity, but for prohibition only.
- ([Do] + Not +) *Have to* usually has a stronger flavour of an obligation imposed by other people or rules than ([Do] + Not) + *Need to*.
- There cannot be more than one modal in a group.

B) MUST versus HAVE (GOT) TO

- Both of these express (positive) necessity or obligation, but they are used in very different ways:
  - *MUST* is a real modal verb, but *Have to* is not -restrictions such as that on use with will do not apply to *Have to*. Also, *MUST* is not used when we talk about the past.
  - *MUST* expresses that the speaker feels that something is necessary. Thus, it is seldom used for questions unless the question is a complaint.
  - *Have to*, on the other hand, expresses that the situation makes something necessary: The speaker refers to a rule, for example.
- *Have got to* is an informal, usually contracted, variant of *Have to*. It means the same.

- Examples:
  - Doctor to patient: “You **must** exercise.”
  - I **must** work harder, or I'll fail the exam.
  - We **must** see *House* tonight -the new season looks great.
  - We **must** invite Janice -she's the soul of every party.
  - **Must** you always leave your things around?
  - I **have to** exercise -the doctor told me.
  - She **had to** work real hard, but in the end she passed.
  - I **had to** work late, so I missed *House*.
  - We **have to** invite John, or he'll be offended.
  - **Do** we **have to** start now, or can we wait a bit?
C) **Mustn't, Needn't etc.**

- *Needn't* is seldom used in American English. In Britain, it is a common alternative to [Do] + Not + Have to.
- We include [Do] + Not + Have to and [Do] + Not + Need to here— they mean the same as Needn't. For the sake of economy, we shall use Needn't for explanations.
- **Mustn't** is used to say that something is a bad idea, while *Needn't* expresses that something is not necessary.
- For *didn't need to* versus *needn't have + [past participle]*, see below.

**Compare:**

- You **mustn't** drop that glass -it'll break!
- I **mustn't** forget my key, or I won't get back in.
- You **mustn't** wear nice clothes -you'll ruin them out there.
- You **needn't/don't have** to wash those glasses -they're clean.
- We **needn't/don't have to** make sandwiches: We'll eat there.
- You **needn't/won't have to** wear shirt-and-tie, a nice T-shirt is OK.

C2) **Didn't Need to versus Needn't Have + [Past Participle]**

- *Didn't Need to* means “It wasn't necessary to...”, while *Needn't Have + [Past Participle]* means that something that was done was not necessary after all.

**Observe:**

- I was so happy the train was empty -I **didn't need to** stand.
- Jenny **didn't need to** hurry -there was plenty of time, and she drove slowly.
- I booked a table, but I **needn't have done** so -the restaurant was empty.
- Jenny **needn't have hurried**, but she drove fast and arrived an hour early.

► With Jenny, the case is clearest: In her first example, she had time and went at her own pace. In the second, on the other hand, she also had time, but drove at top speed anyway. As a result, she had to wait when she reached her destination.
D) Exercises

• Put in the correct modal or semi-modal. Any of the above may be the right one. The main verbs in brackets may or may not need to be changed.

1. “When I was younger, I ________________ (work) eleven hours a day,” Grandma said.
2. Come on, we ________________ (hurry). We ________________ (be late)!
3. I watered the plants yesterday, and now it's pouring down. I ________________ (bother)!
4. Anne ________________ (wear) a uniform in school. She hates it.
5. Nowadays, young children ________________ (work) in factories. A hundred years ago, many of them ________________ .
6. He said he was sorry he ________________ (go), but he ________________ (catch) the last underground train.
7. “You ________________ (be) in bed by nine,” their mother said. Susie grumbled, “Why ________________ (always/go) to sleep so early? It's not fair!”
8. We ________________ (leave) so early -we arrived two hours before my parents' arrival, and now we'll ________________ (wait).
9. You ________________ (put) those goblets in the dishwasher -it'll destroy them.
10. I think you ________________ (pay) to park there. That line is blue.
11. A: “I ________________ (finish) this report today.”
   B: “Why? Tomorrow's a bank holiday, so it ________________ (be finished) before Monday, and you can send it by e-mail.”
   A: “Yeah, but I ________________ (send) it tomorrow -it's the date of sending that counts, not the date of receipt.”
12. We ________________ (stick together) -it's dangerous out there.
13. You ________________ (lock) the door properly -there are lots of burglars around.

1 Bother: molest (-se).